

Cities is a great topic for EFL classes because it can be used at every level of seriousness from “What is the best nightlife area in your city?” to “What should the local government do to make your city more sustainable?”

Language To Talk About Cities

- Adjectives to describe cities, including understanding which ones are positive and negative (“congested”, “lively”, etc)
- Language for comparing and contrasting (e.g. “It’s a bit like London, but more...” and “It’s near London but totally different”)
- Describing positions of cities (“near the sea”, “in the Northwest”, etc)
- Parts of cities (“downtown”, “suburbs”, “outskirts”, etc)
- Things in cities (“town hall”, “underground”, etc)
- Describing changes in the city and parts of it (“becoming more cosmopolitan”, “expanding”, “gentrifying”)
- Language of generalisation (“most people are commuters”, “generally locals don’t like...”, etc)

Other Language That are Tied In With Cities

- Opinions
- Recommendations (e.g. places to visit, parts of the city to live in, changes the government should make)
- Numbers (e.g. guessing how many people or the ranking of cities)
- Predictions
- Used to
- Hedging language, e.g. modals of possibility and probability

Interesting Topics And Activities Related To Cities

The ideas below include discussions and debates, talking about the past and future, guessing games, activities using pictures and statistics, plus other stimulating and useful speaking activities.

- The world's most/ least liveable cities (e.g. using the annual survey from the Economist)
- Which city they are thinking
- Arguments for and against cities being the most sustainable way of living in the modern world
- Ways of improving a city or cities generally
- Predictions for the future of cities or a particular city
- Guessing which cities are being described from some statistics
- The largest city in the world at various times in history
- The first cities
- Looking at predictions about the future of cities, e.g. in science fiction books, that turned out to be right or wrong
- Trying to identify cities from unusual viewpoints, e.g. from Google Earth pictures or details such as doors and street signs
- Talking about changes in particular cities, which are good and bad, and whether overall change has been positive or negative
- Arguments about how to define the world's biggest cities
- Discussing public sculpture
- Privatising city services like rubbish collection and public pools
- Deciding on planning regulations (or changes to them) for a city
- Roleplaying a planning meeting held to discuss one change to the city, e.g. turning a swamp into an industrial area or extending an airport
- Arguments for and against merging and demerging the local governments of cities or a city and the surrounding countryside

- Arguments between the local and national government about how a capital city should develop
- “Big society”, community activism and/ or volunteering in cities
- Ideas about what to do about internal immigration into cities
- Discussion of laws that allow governments to move people out of their homes, e.g. to widen motorways
- Public housing
- Preservation of 1960s and 1970s “classic” modernist/ brutalist buildings
- Discussing city planning policies that are popular with business but not with local residents
- Making cities greener
- Dealing with the problem of unaffordable housing
- Dealing with slums
- What one city can learn from other cities, e.g. discussing which ideas could successfully transfer to other places and which couldn’t
- Cities in decline, e.g. Detroit, or cities which turned themselves around
- Making a city more attractive to tourists or a particular group of people who live there, e.g. young families
- Planning a new city or area from scratch
- Bringing business to a historic city like Rome without ruining its charms
- Combining modern and historic architecture, e.g. the Louvre pyramid
- The least famous capital cities
- The world’s smallest capital cities
- Choosing a capital of a region, e.g. the capital of ASEAN
- How far to go with disaster prevention, e.g. banning tall buildings in an earthquake zone or building huge seawalls in a tsunami zone

- Arguments for and against moving the government to a smaller city
- Arguments for and against economic free zones
- Discussion of what to do with a piece of land that has suddenly become available, e.g. a military base or factory that has just closed
- Waste disposal
- Discussion on how to spend a municipality's budget, how to cut down on spending or where to set the balance between taxation and spending
- Cities proclaiming independence from the country they are in
- City states in history and/ or the present world
- Dealing with particular problems, e.g. congestion, youth crime and pollution
- Cities that have different names or pronunciation in English, e.g. Cologne and Florence
- European City of Culture
- Good and bad influences of hosting sporting events (e.g. The Olympics) on cities
- Preparing a bid to hold a sporting event